

PROTEIN



What does it do in the body?

Protein is made up of amino acids that are the building blocks for muscles, hormones, blood, hair, skin, nails, and internal organs. Next to water, protein is the most plentiful substance in the body. Protein provides 4 calories per gram. Protein is an important macronutrient that is essential for life. Protein is needed for cellular repair and for the immune response. Protein is also needed for building and maintaining muscle.

What foods contain protein?

Protein is found in foods such as meat, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy products, beans, nuts, and tofu. There are minimal amounts of protein found in most vegetables (other than legumes), fruits, grains, and oils.



How much protein do you need?

The RDA (recommended dietary allowance) for protein is .8-1 grams per kilogram of body weight. In case you are wondering how to get from pounds to kilograms, you divide your weight in pounds by 2.2 to get your weight in kilograms. For a 150 pound person the weight in kilograms is 68 and that would mean the RDA for that person was 54-68 grams of protein. For most people, especially active people or those with medical conditions such as COPD, there might be a benefit from a slightly higher protein intake. The average moderately active person might benefit from closer to 1.2 grams/kilogram or 81 grams of protein for a 150 pound individual. This is slightly over simplified as protein needs may vary depending on the person's age, health status, activity level, and body fat percentage.

Common Protein Mistakes

Consuming too much protein at one meal. Many people do not get enough protein or they under-consume protein all day and eat a large portion at night. Research on protein consumption suggests it is better to eat adequate protein at each meal and snacks during the day. The recommended intake of protein at each meal is about 20-30 grams and snacks about 10-15 grams. This would be equivalent to a 3-4 ounce chicken breast, 1 cup of pinto beans, or 8 ounces of Greek yogurt. Having protein at each meal can help with satiety and research suggests that there is a tipping point for protein at each meal in which adding more will not be beneficial. It is better to spread protein out with smaller amounts at each meal rather than eating one large portion at one meal.

Relying too much on protein supplements. There is a time and place for protein powders and protein bars, but they should not be the most abundant protein source in the diet. Protein powders do contain protein, but they lack other nutrients that the body needs including B vitamins and minerals. It is best to get most of your protein from foods and not supplements.

Focusing too much on protein while ignoring other nutrients. Atkins and other high protein diets are popular, but these diets tend to overemphasize protein foods and don't focus enough on all the food groups that create a balanced and healthy diet. Make sure you get an adequate amount of healthy fats and carbohydrates from vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts and seeds, dairy and beans and legumes.

10 ways to get more protein

1) Make sure you are getting protein at breakfast. Skip the cereal and aim for a protein rich food. Examples include eggs, yogurt, nuts, beans, or lean sausage.

2) Snack on cheese or cottage cheese. There is 7 grams of protein in one ounce of cheese or 1/4 cup of cottage cheese so go ahead and enjoy a high protein snack or add these high protein foods to your meals for a protein boost.

3) Top your food with chopped or sliced almonds or other seeds/nuts of choice. Not only do nuts and seeds as a crunch, they also add protein.

4) Choose Greek yogurt. Greek yogurt has at least twice the amount of protein than regular yogurt.

5) Include a high protein food with every meal!

6) Choose leaner cuts of meat such as sirloin steak, flank steak, tenderloin, 90/10 or leaner ground beef, and chicken without the skin.

6) Pair fruit with peanut butter. This makes a delicious snack.

7) Eat canned fish such as tuna or salmon for an easy source of protein.

8) Add lentils or beans to your soups to up the protein content.

9) Sneak unflavored protein powders into your meals. This includes shakes, smoothies, hot breakfast cereals, soups, and yogurts.

10) Try beef jerky for a snack.

